



Senate Armed Services Committee Passes Report Language Based on the SERVE Act within NDAA: *First Step in Expanding Access to Eating Disorders Care for Military Members and their Families of All Ages*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (June 22, 2020) — The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) applauds Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Martha McSally (R-AZ) for their leadership in including report language based on the bipartisan Supporting Eating Disorders Recovery through Vital Expansion (SERVE) Act ([S. 2673](#)), within the “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021” (NDAA) that was voted through in the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) last week.

Currently, military family members over the age of 20 years old are not permitted to receive higher levels of care for eating disorders, and servicemembers and their families have significantly less access to treatment than their civilian counterparts. The SERVE Act provisions included within the Senate NDAA would encourage the Department of Defense to expand access to treatment for eating disorders under TRICARE for servicemembers and their families without current age limitations, and implement mental health early identification trainings within the Armed Forces.

“Eating disorders are serious mental health illnesses that should be treated with the same urgency as any physical illness, and that’s especially true for our service members. Our military members deserve access to the same health benefits as the men and women they’re sworn to protect,” said **Senator Shaheen**. “I’m glad this year’s defense bill includes language based on my bipartisan legislation with Senator McSally and encourages the Department of Defense to expand access to treatment for eating disorders under TRICARE for service members, veterans and their dependents. Our military families make great sacrifices on behalf of our nation, a debt we can never fully repay. At the very least, we must ensure they have the health care and assistance they need to live safe, healthy and happy lives.”

“Some 30 million Americans have struggled with an eating disorder, with our servicemembers and their families suffering at higher rates than their civilian counterparts,” said **Senator Martha McSally**. “This year’s defense authorization bill includes language from my bipartisan SERVE Act to support those who fought for us by encouraging the expansion of necessary recovery treatment under TRICARE. This will better equip our commanders and supervisors to identify the signs and symptoms of potentially lethal eating disorders. I encourage the Senate to adopt this measure in full.”

This Committee passage represents a victory for service members and their families affected by eating disorders, as it is the first step in the legislative process toward the SERVE Act becoming law. The House Armed Services Committee is expected to vote on their version of the NDAA by July 4th, and the House of Representative Congressional leads, Reps. Seth Moulton (D-MA), Brian Mast (R-FL), and Veronica Escobar (D-TX), are working for the inclusion of the House SERVE Act ([H.R. 2767](#)) within the House NDAA, expected to receive a vote on July 1, 2020. If successful, the House and Senate NDAA will be negotiated between the chambers and expected to pass into law before the December 2020 holiday season.

“I’m thrilled to hear that language based on the SERVE Act has been included in the Senate NDAA. As a teen who struggled with anorexia in a military family, access to residential treatment through TRICARE would have allowed me to pursue a medically recommended level of treatment that would have prevented me from cycling for several years through inpatient hospitalization and outpatient treatment,” said **Kim Holachek, daughter of an Army servicemember**. “I’m certain that the integration of residential care for eating disorders under TRICARE will improve access to the treatment needed for a sustained recovery.”

Military members and their families experience higher prevalence rates of eating disorders than the civilian population, with an estimated 7-8% of servicemembers affected by this serious mental illness. Research also shows that 21% of children of servicemembers have been screened as at-risk for an eating disorder, a prevalence rate three times higher than the rate observed for their civilian peers. Additionally, 34% of female active duty military members have been screened as at-risk, and 16% of female veterans are affected by an eating disorder today. The strong correlation between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma, and eating disorders among servicemembers and their families, along with the fact that eating disorders have the second-highest mortality rate of any psychiatric condition, demonstrates a need for Congress to ensure early intervention and access to treatment for this life-threatening disorder.

“The inclusion of language supporting eating disorder treatment expansion the SERVE Act within the Senate NDAA is a major step forward in ensuring that servicemembers and their families are able to access the eating disorders treatment they need and deserve,” said **Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, Board President of the EDC**. “The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action is proud to be at the table representing all those who serve and sacrifice for our country every day.”

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a Washington, DC-based, federal advocacy organization comprised of advocacy organizations, academics, treatment providers, family/loved ones of children with eating disorders and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can also be found at eatingdisorderscoalition.org.

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